

U.S. Patent Appln. No. 09/736,055
Amendment
Reply to Office Action dated December 14, 2005

Docket No. 7704-10

REMARKS

The foregoing amendments and these remarks are timely filed in response to the Office Action dated December 14, 2005. Although no fees are believed to be due, authorization is given to charge any required fees, and credit any overpayments, to Deposit Account No. 50-0951.

At the time of the Office Action, claims 1-61 were pending. In the Office Action, claims 1-61 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102 in view of U.S. Patent No. 5,422,81 to Allen et al. ("Allen"). The rejection is set out in more detail below. All claims are believed to be patentable for reasons set forth below.

I. Fees Due for Additional Independent Claims

In this response, claims 2 and 37 were amended to independent claim format and independent claim 48 was cancelled. Thus, fees are only necessary for one new independent claim. Authorization is given to charge these fees, and any other necessary fees, to Deposit Account No. 50-0951.

II. Rejections on Art

Claims 1-61 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) as being anticipated by Allen. Before reviewing Allen, a brief review of the independent claims is appropriate.

A. Review of Independent Claims

Claim 1 has been amended to remove recitation of a forwarding address.

Claim 2 has been amended to an independent claim and recites a reverse side imager, in addition to other features, as excerpted below:

a reverse side imager positioned to image a sender return address indicator located on a second side of each of the plurality of intermixed mailpieces and to interpose the image into the single-scan image of address and notification indicators located on the opposing side of each of the plurality of intermixed mailpieces as created by the mailpiece scanner so as to create a single data image including receiver location address indicator, sender return address indicator, and sender notification indicator data.

System claims 56 and 57 have also been amended to recite a reverse side imager.

Claim 20 has been amended to recite:

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a forwarding notification generator responsive to a sender notification indicator positioned on a mailpiece to generate an image of the corresponding location address indicator, forwarding address indicator and return address indicator and instruct the mailpiece labeler to label a separate mailpiece with the corresponding image of location address indicator, forwarding address indicator, and sender return address indicator so as to generate a mailpiece to be sent to the sender indicating the forwarding address corresponding to the receiver location address; and

wherein the forwarding notification generator further comprises an image sizer to generate images sized to fit within preselected dimensions of an area space so as to be positioned on a mailpiece having a preselected size.

Method claim 54 has been amended to recite the step of generating images sized to fit within preselected dimensions of an area space so as to be positioned on a mailpiece having a preselected size.

System claim 31 has been amended to recite

the mailpiece conveyor driven by a motor responsive to a mailpiece size sensor to feed mailpieces at rates determined by mailpiece size and to thereby process letter-sized mailpieces at a predetermined speed and flat mail-sized mailpieces at a different speed.

Method claim 52 has been amended to recite the step of varying conveyor speed based on mailpiece size.

System claim 37 has been amended to an independent claim and recites postage-due reporting means, in addition to other features, as excerpted below:

wherein the processing means further comprises postage-due reporting means for summing the number of mailpieces to be sent to senders indicating the forwarding address corresponding to corresponding receiver location addresses and computing the total postage due thereon.

Method claim 61 recites three steps, including, "creating a modified return-to-sender indicator including the customer address change dates."

B. All of the Independent Claims are Patentable Over Allen

Allen is limited to forwarding incorrectly addressed mail as noted in its title "Apparatus For Intercepting And Forwarding Incorrectly Addressed Postal Mail." In contrast to Allen, claim 1 of the current application recites a mailpiece feeder, a mailpiece transporter, a mailpiece

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scanner, a mailpiece labeler, and a process controller having a return-to-sender determiner, a sender notification determiner and a mailpiece stacker. Also in contrast to Allen, claim 1 recites that the process controller can separate the single scan image into discrete data groups. It is believed that without the recitation of a forwarding address determiner, as present in previous claim 1, Allen does not teach or suggest the system recited in amended claim 1, and, thus, withdrawal of the rejection is respectfully requested.

Allen does not teach or suggest one or more of the features recited in each of the independent claims. For instance, system claims 2, 56 and 57 recite a reverse side imager that is not disclosed in Allen. Since Allen does not teach or suggest any structure for reverse side imaging, Allen also cannot teach or suggest such a step. Withdrawal of the rejections regarding these claims is respectfully requested.

Allen also does not teach or suggest a forwarding notification generator that generates a ready to be mailed forwarding notification for a mail piece of a preselected size as more fully recited in claim 20. Such a ready to be mailed forwarding notification generator is a non-obvious improvement over Allen. Allen is limited by the manual process of printing and collecting forwarding information sheets for further distribution, as follows:

If an addressor has requested to be informed of the forwarding of incorrectly addressed mailpieces, the digitized images of each forwarded mailpiece will be accessed from memory 102 and off-line printed. The forwarded mailpiece printouts for each addressor are then collected and sent by the USPS to the addressor to provide notification of both the forwarding of the mailpiece and the new forwarding address for the addressee.

Allen, col. 15, lines 10-19. Applicant submits that the process described in Allen still requires costly manual labor to collect the off-line printouts of forwarding information sheets, determine the recipient and finalize for mailing, including possibly creating and sealing the information sheets in an envelope.

In contrast, the system recited in claim 20 provides a forwarding notification generator and an image sizer to create mailpieces of preselected sizes that are ready to be mailed without any manual labor or human intervention. An example of such a ready to be mailed mailpiece is found at Figure 10. Applicant submits that Allen does not teach or suggest at least these features of independent claim 20 and the corresponding method claim 54. Withdrawal of the rejections regarding these claims is respectfully requested.

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Allen also does not teach or suggest a variable speed mailpiece conveyor driven by a motor responsive to a mailpiece size sensor. Allen provides only a fixed speed conveyor, and the corresponding limitation of being able to process only one size of mail.

In contrast, claim 31 recites a variable speed mailpiece conveyor with a motor responsive to a mailpiece size sensor. Such a system allows the conveyor to adjust its speed so that that processing of mail, including any scanning or labeling, is based upon the mail size. As a result thereof, the system recited in claim 31 can process mailpieces of various sizes. Nowhere does Allen teach or suggest a variable speed mailpiece conveyor. Accordingly, Allen also cannot teach or suggest the step of varying the speed of the mailpiece conveyor. Withdrawal of the rejections regarding these claims is respectfully requested.

Finally, the Office Action rejected claim 61 by citing column 6, line 60 through column 7, line 5 of Allen. This text has been copied below in its entirety.

The destination address revealed by the decoded character information is processed by the circuit 90 in the USPS ZIP+4 database 104 to determine the delivery point ZIP code for the mailpiece. It will, of course, be understood that any other database including delivery points and corresponding delivery point ZIP codes (for example, the USA database) may be substituted for the ZIP+4 database. The delivery point information (comprised of the delivery point ZIP code and/or destination address) is then processed in an extract of the USPS National Change of Address (NCOA) database 106 (containing the name and former address of each addressee at each delivery point who has filed a change of address form with the USPS) to determine if a forwarding request has been logged against that delivery point. It will, of course, be understood that any other database including a list of addressee names, and former addresses (and forwarding addresses) may be substituted for the NCOA database.

Allen, col. 6, line 58 -col. 7, line 8. Applicant submits that this text, and Allen in general, does not teach or suggest the step of creating a modified return-to-sender indicator including the customer address change dates as recited in step 61. Withdrawal of this rejection is respectfully requested.

III. Conclusion

For at least the reasoning set forth above, Applicant respectfully submits that Allen does not teach or suggest all of the features as recited in the independent claims. Therefore, independent claim 1, 2, 20, 31, 37, 52, 54, 56, 57, 58 and 61 are believed to be allowable. The

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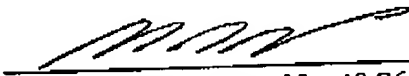
dependent claims are believed to be allowable due to dependence on an allowable independent claim and for further features recited therein.

Applicant has made every effort to present claims which distinguish over the prior art, and it is believed that all claims are in condition for allowance. Nevertheless, Applicant invites the Examiner to call the undersigned if it is believed that a telephonic interview would expedite the prosecution of the application to an allowance. In view of the foregoing remarks, Applicant respectfully requests reconsideration and prompt allowance of the pending claims.

Respectfully submitted,

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